

Title: One, two, three up to infinity  
Date: 11/03/24  
Subject: Christians are to have an attitude of thankfulness to the Lord.  
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Ephesians 5:19,20

A few quick things about our time away. The first weekend was in Lincoln, NE. Spent time with Jean's siblings. Went to a college football game where a drunk threw up at my feet. There were other times when we felt like the apostle Paul when he listed some of the things he faced and was in danger from this or that.

The traffic was horrendous at times - dump truck riding our bumper...or moving over a lane after passing a semi on a four lane highway to see someone from the opposite direction cross two or three lanes to get in front of the same semi. Just missed getting sideswiped. Or another semi that roared past and decided to come into our lane, cutting us off. We didn't like it. Nor did the State trooper who saw it and got him.

Jean was sick on a Sunday. She also tripped entering our house and landed on her knee. I went to put down the stuff I had and then I heard her, "Oh honey, it's worse than I thought." My mind's racing. I get back to the entryway. She rolls to her side and starts laughing as she reveals the restaurant leftovers she'd been carrying had come out of the box and she was laying on them. Her knee was scraped but thank the Lord, not worse.

Don't have time to tell about the hotel room where we killed numerous stink bugs, going to the Fox River Mall to find fire alarms blaring and the intercom telling people to evacuate, mini golfing at the course voted the best in Pigeon Forge...but it must have been before others were built.

Lots of more positive experiences. Casting Crowns concert which included five other groups where we were in the next to the top row. Another college football game when Nebraska played at Ohio State, this time the 103rd row, the top one. It seems like we have a thing for being in the nosebleed seats. The first game we were in 96th row, but it really gave us a fantastic view of the military fly over which was awe-inspiring. We ate out a lot while we were here or traveling, redid our back deck - though had to go back to get more stuff but still have all my fingers and toes. Enjoyed being in Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg TN...though we didn't see any black bears or Sasquatch except on T-shirts, assorted souvenirs and signs. Spent quality time together.

Another thing I was grateful for is when I got back to the office is my key still worked. You hadn't changed the locks.

I'll say it again, we're grateful and thankful to you and for you.

Our focus for the next two months in the messages will coordinate with the prayer requests from the November prayer calendar. Today's it's about having an attitude of thankfulness. The Sundays in November will match the dates' request. The requests from the last week serve as the basis for the messages in December. We're going to have a mash-up of Thanksgiving with Christmas.

The title for today's message is from the song Counting My Blessings. "One, two, three up to infinity. I'd run out of numbers, Before I could thank You for everything. God, I'm still counting my blessings, For all that You've done in my life. The more that I look in the details, The more of Your goodness I find. Father on this side of heaven, I know that I'll run out of time. But I will keep counting my blessings, Knowing I can't count that high."

As part of the preparation for these messages, I conducted a scripture search for verses that contain the words thank, thanks, thankful, thankfulness, thanksgiving, and related words like praise, grateful and gratitude. I found over 500 references with some verses having both thanks and praise. They aren't exactly interchangeable but are closely related. The Old Testament uses *praise* a little bit more than *thanks*. The New Testament is a different story where the *thanks* and its cousins win in a super dominant landslide.

Definition of thanks. I consulted the classic Bible Dictionary by Vine. "Denotes gratitude... Thanksgiving is the expression of joy Godward." The words from the Greek language are related to the word most often translated grace (charis). HELPS Word Studies indicates thanksgiving is a combination of the words "good" and "grace" resulting in – "acknowledging that "God's *grace* works well." Strong's Concordance: to be grateful, i.e. (actively) to express gratitude...the word often translated thanksgiving: "an extension of the hand, i.e. (by implication) avowal, or (usually) adoration; specifically, a choir of worshippers -- confession, (sacrifice of) praise, thanks (-giving, offering)."

Probably much of what you expected. The hard part isn't understanding what thanks means but in applying it.

Thanks-a-lonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:18. Read.

Let's begin at the end of the verse. "For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This means the command is for those who have placed their trust and confidence in Jesus Christ. Those who don't know Christ as Savior don't have to pay attention as they really don't need to pay attention to the other commands because it doesn't make sense for them to pay attention to God's principles. It's great when people operate according to the principles of scripture even though they aren't Christians. It makes for a better society and culture. But we shouldn't expect that they'll behave according to what God says.

For the believer, it's a good thing to operate according to God's will. It's protective and beneficial as it keeps us from wandering off into sinful territory. It maintains fellowship and close relationship with God.

This passage gives three things that are God's will as the phrase applies to not just what we read in v. 18 but also the commands in vv. 16 and 17: "Be joyful always; Pray continually." These feed into and off each other.

Little words are incredibly important as in the case of the words "in" and "all." "*In all* circumstances." Some translations state it "in everything," "in every circumstance" (Majority Bible) or "in every situation." The

Amplified Bible likes to be inclusive: “in every situation [no matter what the circumstances].” A couple translations use “Whatever happens.”

We get the idea - in anything and everything that happens, not just the good times when the sky is blue and the road of life is smooth with no potholes and no falling rocks of trials, but also the times when there are potholes and trials. We're to give thanks to God even as we're to be joyful always and pray continually.

How is that possible? It's birthed out of the relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ. It's nurtured by the promises he has for us and the hope he delivers. It's a recognition that it's a way to please him. Remember, it's God's will, which means it's our duty to give thanks to him independent of circumstances, moods and emotions. It's an admission that God is in control and will take care of us. It shows reverence for him. We express our gratitude, our enjoyment of him and what he does, our appreciation to and for. We praise, adore and worship through giving thanks.

Benefits of giving thanks to God. Not going to take time to give Bible references. This will sound more like I Corinthians 13 where the Lord gives a fast-paced description of love that doesn't probe the depths of each aspect.

Giving thanks to God honors him. It builds our faith. It's an encouragement to others. It sanctifies suffering and the entire life. It helps get and keep our focus in the right place. It's a better way to cheer the heart, soul and mind and give release to feelings and emotions than foolish talking, coarse joking, immorality and greed (Ephesians 5:4). It displaces evil ideas, thoughts and words. It creates a bigger space for the Lord in our lives. It helps us not to get down when unpleasant things happen. It helps us develop the proper perspective. It takes the focus off self. It counters complaining.

An old farmer had some business at his wealthy neighbor's estate. When finished, he was asked to stay for lunch. While the host and his buddies dove into the food, the farmer quietly bowed his head to pray. The rich man was amused and asked, “Do many people around here follow such old-fashioned customs?” “Most do.” “This must be a more backward area than I thought. Isn't there anyone nearby sufficiently enlightened not to parade their prayers at the table?” The farmer thought for a moment. “Well, I reckon there are some over at my place who never pray over their food.” The rich man declared victoriously, “College graduates, no doubt.” “No, sir. My pigs!”

We wouldn't want to be associated with pigs. We wouldn't want to be numbered with those who don't give thanks to God.

The Bible speaks of those “who neither glorified him as God nor give thanks to him” (Romans 1:21). The result is they became futile in their thinking, their foolish hearts were darkened, they became fools, they refused to worship the immortal God but worshipped images that looked like people and animals, and God gave them over to their sinful desires be ruled by them, becoming objects of God's wrath (Romans 1:21 - 32).

Time and again followers of Jesus Christ are called upon to overflow with thankfulness (Colossians 2:7), be thankful (3:15), “Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17), “devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (4:2).

Why aren't Christians thankful to God? Sometimes we're forgetful. We can be arrogant and feel entitled, think we deserve the good things we experience. We may even think we caused the good things to happen.

Thankfulness doesn't come naturally. We're to learn and develop the habit of giving thanks in every and all circumstances. I think all of us have been in some very difficult and trying times. The thanks might not come immediately.

We find relief and solace that the Lord says through this verse that we're to be thankful “in” and not “for.”

Here's where things in life get a little gnarly. Ephesians 5:19, 20. Read.

The singing just hit a sour note. The verse doesn't have our little buddy “in.” It has the word “for.” It doesn't sound right to our ears...but it's there. I tried my hardest. I looked through the 30 plus translations available for v. 20 on biblehub.com. I tried to find a way to squeeze “in” into the various versions. Couldn't be done. Not one of them said “in” but “for everything” – for, for, for, for.

And it's not like the passage in Thessalonians where the “always” is connected to being joyful. Here it's “always giving thanks for everything.” Our minds can quickly get into a tailspin like a bullet ridden fighter jet spiraling toward the ground. How are we expected to give thanks “for” everything? *For* the good and *for* the bad?

Let's dig a little deeper. The definition of “for” can help get our breathing back toward normal. The original Greek has the idea of “in behalf of” or “above.” This takes on the idea of rising above this situation.

Two translations (New Heart English Bible and World English Bible) use “concerning” instead of “for.” That might ease our minds a little as it softens the impact just a smidgeon.

22 of the 32 the translations and paraphrases I checked begin the verse with “always giving thanks for everything or for all things.” That seems to pack a wallop and get the soul racing. Eight are like the NIV and mention God the Father prior to everything. Two have a unique sentence structure. They move Jesus earlier: “Always use the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to thank God the Father for everything” (Contemporary English Version). The other puts him in the forefront: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father” (Good News Translation). I think those who did the paraphrase wanted to make it more readable and give the attention to Jesus before introducing the extent of our thanks. Others appreciate the verse closing with the thought about Jesus.

Either way, Jesus is there. However, the name of Jesus isn't a magic incantation that automatically changes the bad into good. Bad will still be bad but, as song by Ben Fuller (If I Got Jesus): “If I got Jesus, I've got all that I could ever need. Take the world away from me, And I'll be okay. If I got Jesus, There's a hope that's living deep inside, A joy that I could never hide, And a safe place to fall. If I got Jesus, I got it all.”

A couple of other passages would be helpful. James 1:2, 3. Read.

We aren't crazy people who are sado-masochistic who take great joy in trials that come upon us. The giving of thanks in and for everything isn't giving thanks for the circumstances but what's transpiring in and through the circumstances. We're grateful, joyful and thankful God has a purpose in allowing and using trials to build into our lives perseverance, maturity and wholeness.

Romans 8:28. Read

Here the words “in...all..things” carry comfort and assurance. God promises us that he is working for our good in and through anything and everything, whatever. He has a plan that we may not be aware of...or understand. But that's okay. He's still on the throne. He still loves us. He will ultimately bring us to his home in heaven.

It takes decision and determination and discipline to give thanks to God in, for and through all things.

Paul said he learned to be content whatever the circumstances (Philippians 4:11). The same thing is true for us in the issue of contentment and giving thanks. It's a matter of where we place our focus.

On a sunny day, if we stand with our back to the sun, the shadow will be in front of us and that's what we see. If we turn and face the sun, the shadow will be behind us. The same is true with Jesus. When we face the Son of God, our focus is on him. If we turn around, we concentrate on the darkness.

We choose to give thanks to the Lord, adoring and worshipping him for the excellencies and wonders of his being and works.